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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000374

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LIMA PLEASE PASS TO GEN. CRADDOCK

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [SNAR](#) [PTER](#) [EC](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: WELCOME BACK, GENERAL CRADDOCK

Classified By: PolMilOff Jarahn Hillsman for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Please accept my warm welcome on your return visit to Ecuador, General Craddock. This mission is mobilized to ensure a successful visit. Your visit comes at a sensitive time. We hope to use it to help defuse the inflamed dialogue with Colombia, advance information sharing with the GOE, and tamp down the GOE's nationalist tendencies in an election year. Given the delicate state of relations between the two neighbors, any public statements will likely be seen as USG intervention in favor of Colombia, compounding the incentives for unhelpful GOE behavior. We therefore have recommended that you avoid the northern border area and concentrate on private diplomacy during this visit. End Summary.

Ecuador-Colombian Relations Fragile

¶2. (C) Dramatically improving Ecuadorian-Colombian relations have suddenly soured following a war of words over the incursion of Colombian military aircraft into Ecuadorian territory in hot pursuit of FARC irregulars on January 28. The incursion reportedly caused 100 residents of the Sucumbios border town of Barranca Bermeja to flee their homes; all have since returned. The GOE has energetically protested the incursion publicly and privately, calling for the GOC to apologize and commit to avoiding such actions in the future. Colombian President Alvaro Uribe on February 6 lamented the accidental incursion, adding that FARC rebels entered Ecuadorian territory to evade capture. After convoking its national security council (CONSENA), the GOE issued a statement of six principles and Pres. Palacio publicly declared the incident "closed."

¶3. (C) On February 8 Uribe raised GOE ire by publicly alleging that the FARC uses Ecuadorian territory to stage attacks against Colombian soldiers and called for the GOE to recognize this so the two countries can address the problem. Uribe's public accusations provoked the GOE and Ecuadorian public opinion. The GOE has rejected the allegation that the FARC stage attacks from Ecuador and FM Francisco Carrion has recalled Ecuador's Ambassador to Bogota for consultations.

Carrion and VFM Diego Ribadeneira have responded publicly to Uribe's statements, squarely placing blame for FARC incursions on the lack of a permanent GOC security presence on the Ecuadorian-Colombian border. The GOE has angrily reiterated its policy of non-intervention in Colombia's internal conflict, reaffirmed its resolve never to engage in joint military operations with the GOC, and the need for Colombia to respect its sovereignty. Ecuadorian officials and commentators have also blamed Colombian electoral politics for Uribe's repeated public statements.

14. (C) The controversy has also played to Ecuadorian national politics, with public and Congressional support for Ecuador's defense nearly unanimous. Most Ecuadorians are sincerely outraged that Uribe would publicly take Ecuador to task for spillover of Colombia's conflict, which is widely resented for the social and security costs it imposes on Ecuador. Palacio and especially Carrion's forceful public rejection of Colombian assertions has caused the political and media elite to rally around the Ecuadorian flag. The public opinion boost for the Palacio government comes after disastrous declines due to a failed domestic agenda.

15. (C) At this point, bilateral cooperation mechanisms are frozen. Our counsel of restraint and dialogue is interpreted as support for Uribe, a key USG ally. Worsening Ecuadorian relations with Colombia have the potential to impede USG efforts to increase cooperation between the two countries on security matters, slow the movement of narcotics through Ecuador, and develop licit cross-border economic activity. Your meeting with MOD Jarrin offers the best opportunity to express USG concern over the escalating tone of confrontation with Bogota, remind the MOD of USG assistance to help mitigate the impact of Plan Colombia, and encourage Jarrin to keep lines of communication open with his Colombian counterpart.

Security Issues Politicized

16. (C) Nationalistic rhetoric is on the upswing in Ecuador in this election year, causing security issues, such as the Manta FOL and Plan Colombia, to become politicized. FM Carrion, recently stated publicly that if he were foreign minister in 2009, he would not renegotiate the Manta agreement "as it does not benefit Ecuador," adding that Ecuador should include the Manta issue into its FTA negotiations with us.

17. (C) It would be very helpful for you to remind MOD Jarrin that the Manta FOL is a key asset in the anti-narcotics fight, which is in the national security interest of Ecuador, and entails a USG investment of well over \$70 m. He might also be encouraged to privately remind the President and key cabinet members that gratuitous comments by this government could damage Ecuador's future options. We have stressed that the Manta FOL anti-narcotics mission is essential to preserve Ecuador's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

MFA Sitting on CNIES

18. (C) The proposed Cooperative Nations Information Exchange System (CNIES) remains pending before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previous inaction was due to bureaucratic bungling.

The issue has since been assigned to the Director General for National Sovereignty Jaime Barberis. During your meeting with the MOD you might encourage him to push the MFA to act on this agreement, which would help Ecuador increase its ability to monitor aerial incursions.

Election Year Sensitivities

19. (C) With presidential and congressional elections in October, the caretaker Palacio government is becoming even more irrelevant (and therefore more secure from the threat of irregular removal). Palacio cannot run for re-election

(although Gutierrez wants to run from prison), and has no party interest in the results. With innumerable aspirants but no firm candidates yet for the two largest parties, the presidential race is still unsettled. The nationalist flare-up of tension with Colombia, the controversial ongoing FTA negotiation, the Occidental Petroleum commercial dispute, and our presence in Manta are all fodder for nationalist and populist flag-waving, and unlikely to produce reasoned debate.

¶10. (C) Your high-profile presence in this context, may well be interpreted as USG interference, presumably favoring Colombia. I therefore recommend that you minimize your public profile for this visit by avoiding the northern border region as well as the press. With security issues in play, we need to use our inside game to keep the Ecuadorians on the right path.

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